

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 4815

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT SHUM ES
SUBJ: INQUIRIES ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN EL SALVADOR

REF: (A) STATE 237404, (B) SAN SALVADOR 3767

1. FOLLOWING ARE EMBASSY COMMENTS ON QUESTIONS CONTAINED
REF A.

2. CASE OF FATHER RUTILIO SANCHEZ. EMBOFF QUESTIONED
CHURCH SOURCES ABOUT SANCHEZ CASE AND HEARD
SANCHEZ' VERSION
OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO REQUEST FOR GUARANTEE OF PERSONAL
SAFETY. SANCHEZ HAS BEEN PARISH PRIEST FOR SAN MARTIN
ABOUT FOUR YEARS. HE RECOUNTED SERIES OF CLASHES WITH
MAYOR OF SAN MARTIN, PRIMARILY OVER LOCAL ISSUES (SUCH
AS MANNER OF CONDUCTING COMMUNITY RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS)
WHICH BEGAN ALMOST AS SOON AS HE ARRIVED TO ASSUME HIS DUTIES.
MAYOR IS FORMER POLICEMAN AND, AS CONFLICT BETWEEN HIM AND
SANCHEZ DEEPENED, HE USED POLICE AND GUARDIA NACIONAL IN
CAMPAIGN OF HARASSMENT AGAINST PRIEST. HARASSMENT BECAME
INCREASINGLY SERIOUS IN EARLY MONTHS OF 1977. THREE OF
SANCHEZ' LAY COLLABORATORS, SACRISTAN AND TWO
"CURSILLISTAS", AS WELL AS ANOTHER YOUTH WHO FREQUENTED
HIS HOUSE, WERE ARRESTED. SANCHEZ THINKS
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THEY ARE ALIVE, BUT THEY ARE STILL IN PRISON. SANCHEZ
ALSO RECOUNTED SEVERAL INCIDENTS IN WHICH HE NARROWLY
ESCAPED PHYSICAL HARM, LAST AND MOST SERIOUS OF WHICH
WAS CASE OF APPARENT MISTAKEN IDENTITY IN WHICH YOUTH
WHO WAS PARKING PRIEST'S CAR WAS SEIZED BY POLICE,
TORTURED AND FORCED TO MAKE TAPE ACCUSING SANCHEZ OF

BEING MEMBER OF FPL. SANCHEZ' CAR WAS NOT RETURNED. AS NATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION WORSENEED IN SPRING OF 1977, AND PARTICULARLY AFTER SLAYINGS OF FATHERS RUTILIO GRANDE AND ALFONSO NAVARRO, SANCHEZ INCREASINGLY FEARED FOR HIS PERSONAL SAFETY. HE LEFT SAN MARTIN FOR SAN SALVADOR IN LATE MAY.

3. ALTHOUGH SANCHEZ WAS SUBJECT TO SURVEILLANCE IN SAN SALVADOR, NO FURTHER INCIDENTS OCCURRED. HE BECAME INCREASINGLY ANXIOUS, HOWEVER, TO RECOVER THE BELONGINGS AND CAR WHICH HE HAD LEFT IN SAN MARTIN, FEARING THAT THE POLICE WOULD USE THEM TO STAGE AN INCIDENT AND BLAME HIM FOR IT. HE ASKED THE ARCHBISHOP TO SEEK A GUARANTEE OF HIS PERSONAL SAFETY TO RETURN TO SAN MARTIN TO RECOVER HIS BELONGINGS. THE GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO GIVE A GUARANTEE, ARGUING THAT SINCE SANCHEZ HAD COMMITTED NO CRIME, THERE WAS NO NECESSITY FOR SUCH A GUARANTEE. SANCHEZ DID NOT RETURN TO SAN MARTIN, BUT HIS CAR WAS RETURNED TO HIM, IN RUINED CONDITION, DURING SEPTEMBER. SANCHEZ IS PLANNING TO RETURN TO HIS PARISH TO RESUME HIS POST ABOUT OCTOBER 15.

4. COMMENT. WE NOTE THAT, ACCORDING TO SANCHEZ' VERSION OF EVENTS, NO GUARANTEE WAS GIVEN, CONTRARY TO VERSION PARA 1A OF REFTL. ACCORDINGLY, QUESTION OF GOOD FAITH DOES NOT ARISE. FURTHER, GIVEN LONG HISTORY OF CONFLICT BETWEEN SANCHEZ, ON ONE HAND, AND MAYOR CONFIDENTIAL

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AND POLICE, ON OTHER, IT WOULD SEEM LIKELY THAT LOCAL POLICE WOULD BE MAKING INQUIRIES IF THEY HEARD HIS RETURN WAS LIKELY. HE IS NOT BEING SOUGHT ON ANY CHARGES, ALTHOUGH POLICE ALLEGEDLY HAVE "EVIDENCE" OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH FPL. WITHOUT BENEFIT OF DISINTERESTED ACCOUNT OF EVENTS, WE SPECULATE THAT SANCHEZ' PROBLEMS WERE CAUSED BY CONFLICT WITH LOCAL POWER STRUCTURE AND THAT ACTIONS AGAINST HIM WERE, AT GWAST INITIALLY, LOCAL INITIATIVES WHICH BECAME MORE SERIOUS AS NATIONAL SITUATION DETERIORATED. WE ALSO SPECULATE THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE PROBLEMS, PRIMARILY WITH MAYOR, AFTER HIS RETURN TO HIS PARISH EVEN IF GOES WERE TO INSTRUCT ITS FORCES TO CEASE HARRASSMENT.

5. RETURN OF EXILES. TO DATE, ONLY ONE PDC EXILE OF ANY STANDING HAS RETURNED TO EL SALVADOR, COL. MARIANO MUNGIA PAYES (SEE REF B). ACCORDING TO STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT ROMERO, HIS OFFER APPLIES TO FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES COL. CLARAMOUNT AND NAPOLEON DUARTE. THE CASES ARE QUITE DIFFERENT. CLARAMOUNT IS A WEAK, CORRUPT FIGURE WITH NO INDEPENDENT POLITICAL

BASE AND HIS RETURN WOULD POSE NO PROBLEM FOR THE REGIME. DUARTE, ON THE OTHER HAND, STILL RETAINS CONSIDERABLE CHARISMA AND IF HE WERE TO RETURN AND RE-ENTER POLITICAL ACTIVITY, A NEW AND DISTURBING FACTOR WOULD ENTER THE POLITICAL EQUATION. ACCORDINGLY, IN SPITE OF PRESIDENT ROMERO'S STATEMENT, WE DOUBT THAT DUARTE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RETURN WITHOUT STRICT CONDITIONS BEING IMPOSED ON HIS ACTIVITIES. AT THE PRESENT TIME, THE PRESIDENT MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO BRING DUARTE BACK UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, EVEN IF HE WANTED TO, WITHOUT STIRRING UP A HORNET'S NEST. IN THE PRESENT SITUATION WE BELIEVE PDC LEADERS OTHER THAN DUARTE COULD RETURN TO EL SALVADOR AND OPERATE RELATIVELY FREE OF HARRASSMENT.

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6. AT THIS STAGE OF THE GAME, THE RETURN OF THE EXILES APPEARS TO BE LARGELY A QUESTION OF POLITICAL NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE PDC AND THE REGIME. THE EXILES ARE AN IMPORTANT CARD IN THE PDC'S HAND IN THE CURRENT ROUND OF POLITICAL POKER AND THEIR RETURN WILL PROBABLY COME AS PART OF A TOTAL ARRANGEMENT UNDER WHICH THE PDC MIGHT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS.
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